



pep
partnership for
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policy

Developing a strategy to maximize research impact

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Since its creation in 2002, PEP has developed a unique and highly effective program to strengthen and promote the expertise of young and promising researchers in developing countries, even in the most challenging contexts.

Based on a “learning by doing” approach, PEP’s unique mechanism for capacity building and research support empowers beneficiaries to not only achieve the highest standards of scientific quality but also to link their findings with actual policy processes and actions in their home countries.

Another unique and key aspect of this “Grant Plus” mechanism is its integration with a highly sophisticated web-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system that, when combined with a conditional grant payment system, enables PEP to:

- Ensure that all recommendations from mentors/experts assigned to a project are being incorporated throughout the project, and are reflected in the outputs/outcomes in terms of research quality (new and sound evidence base), capacity building, and policy outreach.
- Collect and process detailed information about the various impacts a single research grant/project can generate at the local, national, and international levels.
- Continually improve its strategy to maximize the effectiveness and impact of its activities.

The M&E system in its current form, described in detail below, has been used since 2012.

The following statistics show the kinds of data that have already been generated by this system based on information from **65 projects supported between 2012 and 2016**.

1 in 7
projects resulted in
**high-level scientific
journal publication**

Several more submissions from projects completed in 2016 are being considered for publication



1 in 3
projects resulted in
**findings taken up to
influence policy**

Another **20%** elicited **official statements that findings will be used for policymaking**

The schematic below summarizes the foundations and key components that constitute the current PEP M&E system.

Starting from...

PEP M&E strategy

Defines the general **objectives** of PEP support:

- Research quality
- Capacity building
- Promotion of local expertise
- Dissemination of findings
- Policy outreach & impact

Provides a list of **indicators** for each objective, to assess achievement

PEP intranet

A highly sophisticated **web-based project management system**.

- Contains all information and documents related to each grant, and to each individual involved in a project.
- All project team members can access/interact with their project/personal space on the intranet.
- The system also processes information to produce various data reports.

PEP policy for grant payments

To ensure success and quality of PEP projects, release grant payments:

- **In tranches**
- **Following submission of satisfactory periodic outputs**

Each output is carefully reviewed by experts and often subject to several revisions before approved and the grant payment released.

Added in 2012...

Survey questionnaires

A series of questionnaires developed to collect data from PEP research teams (grant recipients). Questionnaires related to each objective and its indicators, as identified in the M&E strategy.

Automated survey tool

M&E questionnaires integrated into the project space on the PEP intranet i.e. accessed by researchers. The system collects and records information reported by the researchers. It also allows **data compilation, processing and reporting** in various formats, including statistics.

Condition to grant payments

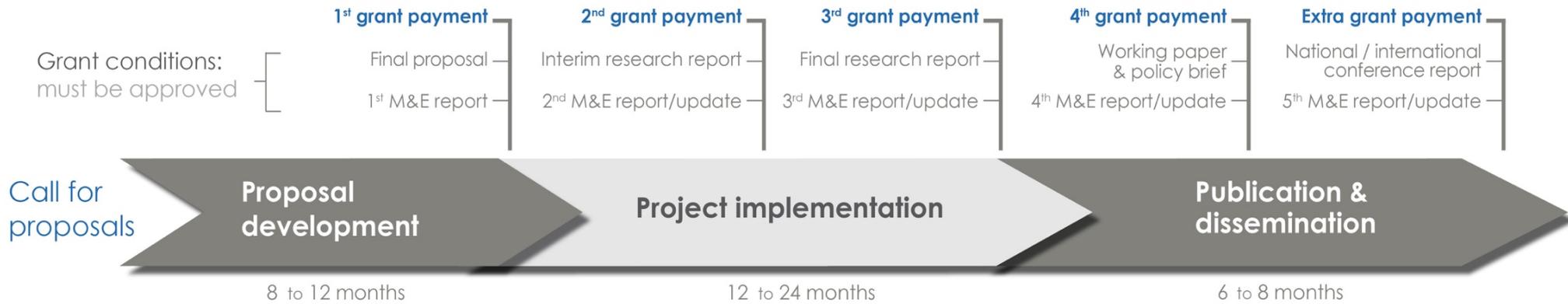
Researchers must complete the relevant M&E questionnaires to receive each grant payment.

While research outputs are reviewed by scientific experts, M&E questionnaires are monitored and reviewed by PEP M&E staff, who specialize in policy engagement and communications, i.e. able to advise on related strategies.

**PEP M&E
SYSTEM**

Since 2012

And so, grant recipients must complete/update the M&E surveys as a condition for the release of each grant payment, according to the following timeline:



By requiring researchers to complete detailed questionnaires about research communication and policy engagement from the onset of the project cycle—starting with the proposal templates used to submit a project to PEP—researchers were encouraged to undertake additional initiatives related to these objectives.

A report on initial consultations with policy stakeholders was required upon selection for support (the first grant payment). Monitoring research communication and policy engagement activities from the beginning of the project in this way allowed PEP to track the progress and impacts of each project at the local and national levels. M&E staff used this information to provide customized advice to each research team to improve their outreach strategy. It also enabled PEP to identify researchers' main strengths and weaknesses, and thus where additional support was needed to enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Based on and in response to this information, PEP designed and introduced various new support activities to the **PEP "Grant Plus" mechanism** as the need arose. The resulting process of the PEP mechanism to support research and build manifold capacity among beneficiaries is presented in the **Annex**.

This experience has shown that the quality and impact of PEP-supported projects, as reflected in the M&E data, is correlated with the sophistication of the support and capacity building activities.

Strengthening the “Evaluation” component of the PEP M&E system

In 2016, following a request from IDRC, the M&E system underwent further developments to assess PEP’s performance in achieving its global objectives. The data collected through the M&E system can be used to evaluate PEP’s contribution to capacity building and policy engagement among local researchers.

The developments originated from the model of IDRC’s recently published “Research Quality (RQ)+ Framework.” The new PEP evaluation system is structured around the three main Framework components, i.e.:

- Key influences: criteria considered to determine what PEP calls the “challenge level” of each project that is then used as a “baseline.”
- Dimensions/sub-dimensions (of the overall objectives): to determine the indicators that will be monitored to assess progress or achievements in each area.
- Ratings: a system of values and weights applied to each indicator and used to “measure” the performance in relation to each dimension and, by extension, each objective.

For example, in the new evaluation system:

- PEP’s performance in terms of “**capacity building**” is measured through a series of indicators reflecting:
 - Beneficiary improvements in conducting quality research and applying new knowledge/skills gained through PEP support.
 - The reinvestment of this new knowledge through other research work, dissemination, or transfer.
 - The external acknowledgment of the beneficiaries’ new expertise by their peers or the scientific community.
- The indicators used to assess PEP’s performance in terms of “**policy outreach**” – a few examples of which are presented above (see page 1) – mainly reflect:
 - The legitimacy and importance of the research work for real policy needs/actors.
 - The engagement of beneficiaries with policy stakeholders and the media to democratize their research work and findings.
 - The impact of the project/research in terms of better-informed policy processes and debates at the national level, which can take the following forms:
 - Evidence used to inform the policy debate (directly through the policy processes, or by channeling the media).
 - Evidence used to inform policy decisions (at the formulation/design, implementation or revision/change stages)
 - Direct participation of beneficiaries in current or future policy processes.

The indicators were identified based on the literature and the cumulated experience/observations of PEP projects (particularly since 2012). The implementation of this new system began in 2017 and results from the first complete trial are expected by the end of August 2018.

Annex - PEP Grant Plus mechanism

Priority to fragile contexts and gender-equal teams

Call for proposals

Research

Policy outreach

	Call for proposals	Research	Policy outreach
Shortlist	<p>Research project design</p> <p>Evaluate & advise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 2 rounds of evaluation - with detailed comments by international experts Online courses in relevant methodologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of policy relevance Guidance/support in development of policy context analysis
Final selection	<p>PEP conference</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation of up to two members per shortlisted research team Intensive in-class training in selected analytical approach Presentation, peer review and evaluation of proposals Scientific writing workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation and discussion of policy engagement strategy Policy engagement workshop
Project starts	<p>Research work & policy outreach</p> <p>Support, monitor & advise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing technical support and scientific mentoring Detailed evaluation of each output/report International study visit to prepare final research report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentoring support by policy expert in design/implementation of engagement strategy Monitoring of consultation and outreach initiatives through periodic reports
Interim report(s)			
Study/field visit(s)			
Draft final report			
Best Practice Awards	<p>PEP conference</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation of up to two members per research team Presentation and discussion of research results, with peers and international experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review design of dissemination strategy Research communication workshop
Final report			
PEP publications	<p>Publication & dissemination</p> <p>Support, monitor & advise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate external review and editing of working paper Assist in preparing article to submit to high-level scientific journal Support participation in high-level international conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist in editing and publication of policy brief Monitor and advise multi-audience dissemination strategy Support organization of national policy conference
Journal submissions			
National and international conferences			

N.B. "Research" and "Policy outreach" items indicated in bold are new activities/elements for 2016/17 following lessons learned through the M&E of previous projects.